

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ALGIERS 001591

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [ETRD](#) [MARR](#) [AG](#) [MO](#) [WI](#) [IZ](#) [US](#) [SOFA](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES U.S.-ALGERIAN COOPERATION, SOFA, WESTERN SAHARA, AND ASSASSINATION OF ALGERIAN DIPLOMATS IN IRAQ WITH NEW MFA SECRETARY GENERAL LAMAMRA

REF: ALGIERS 1585

Classified By: Ambassador Richard W. Erdman, Reason 1.4 (b) (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) Ambassador was the first official caller on newly appointed MFA Secretary General Ramdane Lamamra July 31. Lamamra, a former Ambassador to Washington from 1996-99 and to the UN from 1993-96, was recalled from Lisbon last week to replace a colleague (former Secretary General Hocine Meghlaoui) who reportedly had clashed with Foreign Minister Bedjaoui. This message reports Ambassador and Lamamra's discussion of U.S.-Algerian relations, the development of bilateral military ties including the need for a SOFA, Western Sahara, and Lamamra's request for assistance in locating and returning the remains of the two Algerian diplomats murdered by Al-Qaida in Iraq. Reftel reports their discussion of the upcoming emergency Arab Summit in Egypt. Lamamra came across as both well-connected to his own leadership and well-disposed toward the U.S. He will be an excellent and authoritative interlocutor. End Summary.

U.S.-Algerian Relations

12. (C) Ambassador, accompanied by DCM, called on newly appointed MFA Secretary General Lamamra, who returned from Lisbon last week to assume his new responsibilities but was only officially installed late July 30. Ambassador congratulated Lamamra on his new assignment, extended condolences over the assassination of two Algerian diplomats in Baghdad, and noted that bilateral relations had developed considerably since Lamamra's posting to Washington. Lamamra said the U.S. Ambassador was his first official caller, describing this as especially "fitting." Lamamra said he had accompanied Bouteflika on his November 2001 visit to Washington and meeting with President Bush, and had already felt the change at that time. Ambassador commented that U.S. relations with Algeria were developing across the board, with one indication being the surge in the number of official USG visitors to Algeria in the past two years. Lamamra encouraged more Americans to visit Algeria, including journalists. In the 1990s, American journalists had a mistaken understanding of the nature of the terrorist violence in Algeria, but now he thought they were more ready to comprehend that Algeria had been an early battlefield in the "global struggle" against terror.

13. (C) Ambassador observed that the development of relations extended to trade and investment, as Algeria recognized the need to move beyond the French umbrella and into a global economy. Lamamra said that need had long been recognized in Algeria, but was only now being put into action. He cited \$7 billion in Algerian exports to the U.S. in 2004, but added there was still a need for greater diversification beyond hydrocarbons. Ambassador commented that more U.S. firms had participated in this year's Algiers trade fair than ever, and a great number of them were non-hydrocarbon companies looking to establish themselves in Algeria as a regional base for manufacturing. Lamamra said he had been involved with then-U.S. Ambassador Hume in an attempt to bring American fast food franchises such as McDonald's to Algeria, but at the time it had not worked. Now, the Algerian private sector was ready to work with companies such as McDonald's. Ambassador said we should revisit this idea. Lamamra agreed, saying he wanted to see visible "symbols of America" in downtown Algiers.

14. (C) Ambassador offered his analysis that the convergence in U.S.-Algerian interests since 2001 involved not just a common struggle against terrorism after 9/11 but also a shared vision of the future, based on Algeria's movement toward democracy and open markets, that had never existed before. Lamamra commented that energy companies did not need the assistance of diplomats to do business, but other sectors of the economy could benefit from the Embassy's help. He mentioned in this regard his discussions as Algeria's Washington ambassador with Vice President Cheney when he visited Algeria as a private businessman.

Bilateral Military Ties and a SOFA

15. (C) Ambassador said that U.S.-Algerian military to military ties were developing rapidly. The U.S. European Command was working with the Algerian military to counter the threat of GSPC terrorism in the vast Sahelian region. As part of this effort, we had recently held the first joint exercise in Algeria of our special forces. Raising the need for a SOFA, Ambassador said the U.S. participation in this exercise had been very small, but if we were to move forward with this kind of cooperation, which was clearly in our mutual interest and which the Algerian military was eager to do, we would need to conclude a SOFA. The need for a SOFA had been raised in Washington with General Senhadji during the Joint Military Dialogue and again in Algiers with Foreign Minister Bedjaoui, who had reacted positively to the idea of hosting a team of U.S. experts who could discuss what a SOFA entailed and address any concerns. We have SOFAs with roughly 150 countries. They are entirely routine and essentially accord immunities similar to those granted to Embassy administrative and technical staff.

16. (C) Ambassador added that State has proposed sending a team to Algiers September 20-21 to discuss any issues involving concluding a SOFA. Ambassador urged a response as soon as possible. Lamamra asked if he understood correctly that the team would be coming to discuss a SOFA, not necessarily to negotiate a final text. Ambassador confirmed that was correct, noting that Bedjaoui had said there were some issues that might require changes in Algerian domestic legislation. The team would include people who had conducted SOFA negotiations in a number of countries. Noting that this was a new issue for him, Lamamra asked whether the U.S. had secured the full cooperation of the Algerian military on this issue. Was there now an official military to military dialogue? Ambassador responded that had been the purpose of the Joint Military Dialogue, which now provided a formal mechanism for high-level military dialogue.

17. (C) Lamamra noted there had been some military to military exchanges in the 1980s, recalling that Richard Armitage had led such a team to Algiers when Armitage had been Under Secretary of Defense. Ambassador assured Lamamra that we now have numerous regular visits. EUROC is very interested in Algeria and has a strategic vision in which Algeria plays an important part. The recent GSPC attack in Mauritania had had a positive effect in terms of promoting regional cooperation among the Sahelian states as well. Lamamra said he would discuss these issues, including a SOFA, with General Senhadji. He added that in terms of agreeing on the visit of the SOFA team, it would be helpful if we could get him the names and titles of the team members.

Western Sahara and POW Release

18. (C) Turning to the Western Sahara, Lamamra commented that Algeria was pleased to see the appointment of the new UNSYG Personal Representative, von Welsum. Lamamra hoped the appointment would provide badly needed momentum. Lamamra observed that Polisario leader Abdelaziz had announced his willingness to release the remaining Moroccan POWs. To the Ambassador's comment that this was a humanitarian issue and that continuing to hold the Moroccans was harmful to both Polisario and Algeria, Lamamra replied that this was an independent Sahrawi decision. Algeria respected the independence of Polisario decision-making, but would continue to offer the Polisario its advice based on humanitarian concerns. Lamamra added that the Moroccan security services were arresting Sahrawis for merely calling for a referendum. U.S. advice to Morocco to respect human rights would also be appreciated, he said. The situation in the Western Sahara needed to be deescalated. Ambassador assured Lamamra that we were raising this issue in Rabat as well.

Help Algeria Retrieve Remains of Diplomats in Baghdad

19. (C) Lamamra said that over the weekend, he had accompanied Foreign Minister Bedjaoui on his condolence calls on the families of the two Algerian diplomats who were kidnapped and murdered in Iraq. The principal request of the families was that the bodies be returned. Lamamra requested that we inform the GOA if the U.S. had any information about the location of their remains. Returning the remains to their families for burial would help build Algerian popular support for fighting terrorism in Iraq as well as at home.

Comment

10. (C) Lamamra, who speaks excellent English, strikes us as someone who will prove to be an especially valuable and authoritative interlocutor. Unlike his predecessor, he is personally close to President Bouteflika as well as to both Foreign Minister Bedjaoui and Prime Minister Ouyahia. He is also clearly well-disposed to the United States and understands our system and views. Lamamra will be an excellent interlocutor for senior officials in Washington as

well, and we will strongly encourage him to pay an early visit to the U.S. in order to help advance a direct, high-level bilateral engagement.

ERDMAN